

Masthead Logo

Archives Alive

10-21-2014

A Letter from Clarence?

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Fan Letter from Fred

Rhetorical Context

On a cold December night, specifically Christmas evening of 1943, Frederick Biesterfelt wrote a holiday [letter](#) to Evelyn Birkby.

Initially, it seems as though the letter is written in the context of a platonic relationship. When I went back and read the rest of the letters, however, it became apparent that Fred and Evelyn were once much more than friends. With that in mind, I re-read his last letter and looked for subtle hints and good rhetoric. Fred begins the letter by wishing Evelyn a Merry Christmas and telling her about events he had attended the previous evening, including a trip to the YMCA and midnight mass. He "slips" in that he wasn't supposed to be on guard duty tonight, but rather had relieved another soldier so that he could spend the evening with his wife. I'm sure he mentions this to show Evelyn what an upstanding gentlemen he has become.



Fred continues the letter by mentioning an old friend, Everett, who was in town. He brings up the subject by saying, "Oh! By the way...", which makes the letter seem conversational, as if Fred and Evelyn were lifelong friends. In addition, the fact that Evelyn is expected to know who Everett is makes me think that Evelyn and Fred were from the same hometown, sharing a mutual group of friends. The close friendship theory evolves when Fred thanks Evelyn for a Christmas package he had just received. He says that it is "good morale building material," which makes me think that it

was some sort of book or game. After reading their previous letters, it became apparent that Evelyn sent Fred packages quite often.



The closing of the letter made me question their "platonic" relationship. Before signing, Fred says, "Well, Evelyn, I hope that next year I am closer to you, if not with you." In this statement, Fred shows how much he misses her and also makes the assumption that if he were to return within the year, he and Evelyn would be together. A comment like this at the end is effective because Fred writes the rest of the letter with such a friendly tone but still lets Evelyn know that he is pining for her. Interestingly enough,

Fred doesn't sign his name with a closing, just "Fred." Sometime between 1942 and 1943, Fred stopped signing with "Yours, Fred." I don't know if this is because he realized that he was no longer hers (we don't have Evelyn's return mail), but it's evident that he still has feelings which extend past the friend zone.

Historical Context

At the end of Fred's letter, he makes a comment regarding his hope to return home within a year. This was not a false notion, as many historical events, which were advantageous to the allied forces, had occurred.

Earlier in the year, Germany had begun their retreat from the Soviet Union after a heavy loss in the [Battle of Stalingrad](#). This battle was the turning point for Germany, as they suffered a heavy loss of soldiers and resources. In addition, the Allies had just launched the [New Britain Campaign](#), which would contain Japanese forces on the island of New Guinea.

Although I am not sure if Fred knew of these specific events, I am sure he heard rumors from his post at [Camp Bowie](#). Camp Bowie was a military training facility during World War II, where Fred was stationed for almost two years after being moved from Vallejo, CA. The camp was originally created to train the 36th division of the [Texas National Guard](#), but was expanded after the US declared war in 1941. After the expansion, men from all over the US passed through the grounds, including Fred in 1942. During his time at Camp Bowie, he was promoted from private first class, to corporal of the engineer "c" battalion.



Fred experienced the first of many historical events during his time at Camp Bowie. In August of 1943, the first German Prisoners of War arrived at the camp where Fred was stationed. On November 16, 1943 the first Women Army Corps arrived to Camp Bowie so that more men would be free to travel overseas. Fred never wrote a letter from overseas, though that's not to say he wasn't ever deployed. If he was part of the 249th engineer battalion, which was training at Camp Bowie during his time there, then he would have been deployed to England in August of 1944 and not returned to the US until November of 1945. I am unsure, however, because he wrote his last letter on December 25, 1943. He did eventually make it back home to Tripoli, IA after his war years, where he married and had children. The camp was located in Fort Worth,

Texas but closed down in 1946 after being declared as surplus by the US government. For its duration, however, it was the largest training facility in Texas.

Although Fred and Evelyn did not end up together, it is obvious that Evelyn helped keep up his morale during those lonely nights in the army. The idea of having someone to return home to was a driving force for many soldiers, and on that lonely Christmas night in 1943, I am sure that it was Evelyn's writing which gave Fred the most important weapon of war; *hope*.

Written By: Penny Constantinou

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